POETRY QUARTERLY

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Typography by Seán Jennett

THE RESPONSE TO OUR OFFER OF PRIZES for the best poems last year was so disappointing that we think it fairer to use the sum put aside for the purpose to pay contributors in this issue. It is our intention to continue this policy of payment in all future numbers.

EDITORIAL

Some recent controversies in the Press about the poet's public, boil down largely to the distinction between the little magazine and the commercial periodical; or, more simply, to a matter of numbers. Now it is possible to start a little magazine with a capital of ten pounds or less if the number of copies printed is not more than five hundred. It is also possible to increase that circulation to many thousands. But profits will never be sufficient to allow the payment of big dividends, cigar smoking directors, salaries to the worn-out Nabobs of Fleet Street, heavy fees for the aged manuscripts of retired authors, etc., which is the result aimed at by what is known as 'commercial propositions' catering for what they think, generally wrongly, but that is another matter, is the taste of the masses. And these comfortable gentlemen are cliquey to the point of extreme exclusiveness. If the little magazine editor is so, it is not because he wants to be, but because he lacks support, except for two or three friends. Authors of repute will not send MSS. to editors of new ventures which may never appear again; more often, too, because they have never heard of them. The question can finally be reduced to the simple phrase, 'quantity or quality'. Do you prefer the big business man with his limousines, his offices in all the best financial centres of the world, and his little obfuscated prostitute's mind and slug's body, or the devoted labour of the few who, in every generation, struggle to help the good contemporary artist against the neglect of the spoon-fed gangs, running after their bosses. It is the struggle against odds of the little man so much talked about, but whom everybody agrees to ignore. We ask only freedom for all opinions, and no monopolies. In the end it is the public which determines whether circulations rise or fall. An example of this halfway line between the little magazine and commercial publishing is the new 'POETRY' (LONDON), which has risen to the surface once more like a marine monster after its long annual sleep on the bed of the ocean. It is a special new poets' number, and contains a great many good things by, as the editor, Tambimuttu, claims, quite new poets, though at least thirty-five of the rest have been appearing in POETRY QUARTERLY for the past three or four years. We should all like to see 'POETRY' (LONDON) appearing more frequently and less fantastically. It *is* the fashion still in some circles to sneer at the poetry of the forties, but PL has done more to help those who are the greatest contemporary poets than any of us. We ask only for a less generous appearance more often.

PETER URE

The Region of Battle

The web and the cross, the rock, the sword, the cymbal and the morning drum
Which beats towards the stoppage of rivers when the mountains of sand come.
And on the violet horizon the lines perpetually
Reforming. Out of the hot mouth of day
The heart tumbles grotesquely,
Into its tissues infusing
Strange rigours of Eastern madness.
Yes, and stop.
Stop.

The cross and the stole, the book, the hand, the weapon and the darkening shield
Which covers confusion and lies by the uncovered bodies of the killed.
The Region of battle, the region of dust and movement
Gathered into the lines shaken out of order.
The noise in the air and the sighing
Over the flesh pressed together,
The blackened hands and the burnt-out lorry.
The settling, and the slow
Settling.

The bone and the cross, the shell, the rind, the beetle and the empty skull
Displayed in the bare light of day, which terrify and calm the will.
On a stage, on a high stage, set for all to see
Trappings of obsession, the static life,
The objects of disaster which cancel
The tall, regular, moving images of fear.
Put down a ticket and add the sum,
Exist and contemplate
The sum.

The cross and the rock, the skull, the bone, the cymbal and the morning drum
Which beats above the empty river, the bed of exhaustion, where the mountains of sand come.

FRED MARNAU

December Ode

FOR SENTA

Sadness and joy are the soul's
lonely limbs and bones
and, too, that part which dies
when the great black ape
with shoes and buttons and hat
sinks to the ground, by the limbs'
ghostly dance beaten to pieces.
Only when the fair light of courage
radiates for us at our nightly
meal, surrounded by the tread
of the dead and the slinking
feet of human beasts—
our blood is warmed by the mighty
marching armies and voyages
of the angry wanderers of Europe
and the eyes of Our Most Fair Lady.
The while the whistling devil
blows out our fire in the mist
and patiently our heart breathes the ashes.

Turn of the Year

The sun burns now behind the fir trees,
from our dark country drawn away,
a glowing fire for the hearth of merry
gods residing there, where the west is.
For me the wine has set in motion trundling
clocks in my skull. Frost in my ears
and ice on my face, I have at the fence
crowed like a blind man with the neighbour's cockerel,
my arms in the branches and the wind
in my fingers. Look, our worldly god
has forced iron thorns into joints and ankles,

and of thousands who have come to watch
and wait, one alone will without end
behold the fire of the gods, the others,
clasped by the root-shoes of the earth,
sleepy souls, by green and by golden
worms beglittered, forget their wavering, temporal light.

Portrait

FOR CHARLES WREY GARDINER

As a large wingless bird, watching,
with feet and claws of bone,
taking great strides I go across the hills
and sing the old hunting songs. Artemis
the fair one with glistening hair has
been weeping. The dark clouds on the sky
are our piteous sorrow. Wild boars gallop
over the mounting pathways, the dog
snaps, and the rain in the grass is
man's everyday from year to year.
Our singing makes us glad and acquiescent:
Do I not also roam, a lonely figure,
often over the heath and through the forest,
and no-one knows me, no-one do I know.

(Translations by Ernst Sigler)

PAUL POTTS

A Novena for the Feast of St. Luke

(St. Luke, whose feast is on October 18th, is the patron of writers)

I

Death is the man who has the key
To open a door in a wall with no end
No man can see until it has been opened
If there is light out there beyond that door
For death is the man who has the key

II

These are my gods, these millions with no heaven
The sick, the poor, the broke, the blind
You and your child, my wife and I
We are the comic section of a clubman's mind
But these are my gods, these millions with no heaven

III

Get you to know your own cross well
Loneliness is filled by madness and desire
While both are null and void inside a crowd
And there is hunger in the Ritz Hotel
Get you to know your own cross well.

IV

Before the lead is melted into type
A fire that can give light must burn
Cold broken pieces torn from heart's desire
And make of them a quietness and a song
Before the lead is melted into type

V

Inside the railings of each man's heart
A statue hewn from sorrow stands
While in the basic language of desire
The name of Cinderella first appeared
Inside the railings of each man's heart.

VI

Dyked behind this hammered silence
A snowdrop dances and a daffodil
Skates upon the thin ice of a song
And does a figure eight across a broken heart
Dyked behind this hammered silence.

VII

These five long fingers of stretched out memory
Count out the failures doubling back
While cupped together, they can cover
The mind's eye, hiding from it all the world beyond
These five long fingers of stretched out memory.

VIII

In Ulster Catholic in Berlin a Jew
Put me among the negroes and with those
Who like the char concern themselves with width of floor
Keep me, away from safeness and security
In Ulster Catholic in Berlin a Jew.

IX

I'm drunk with the blood from the wounds of the poor
Blinded by the sight of a man in the crowd
Who dipped his tongue in liquid gold
And spat the commas on to a sloganed wall,
Ora pro nobis.

RUTHVEN TODD

John Clare

Time which dealt with others in a flash
Took half a century to wear him down,
And would not let him slip out through the mesh
Of early death but sucked sufficiency of pain:
No, Time would not falter from its cruel design,
With careful plan of the asylum wall,
Which held him shut from everything he'd know
Until his dreams alone could never fail.

The first December cowslip still flowered on
For more than twenty years, the chipping finch
Broke through the silence where his friends had gone;
And Time which had advanced by inch on inch,
Seeing how his love burned, started to retreat
And in the final conflict gained nothing but defeat.

LOUIS ADEANE

The Exiles

In this land there is no wind.
The stile I crossed is lost, the mist
Folds over fields that have no end.
This harsh wet heather is my past
Upright upon the marsh like memory,
And from this point uncoiling futures press
Towards the stepping stones I shall not cross,
The heavy river swimming silently.

This is where children stand, the hand
Frantic at death beats on this salty bed.
The hungry and the faithless understand:
Remembering a legend told at home
They crowd the listening fog with eager dread,
But all is still. The boatman does not come.

Alien

Here in our land he lies,
The fallen eagle
Spread in his sun, the eyes
Regal, unblinded, alone.
Grey with the dust of shock
His torn hands outthrown
Never reached rock,
The warm breasts of stone.

We shot him down.
His sky blasted, vision wasted,
Hunger stinted, love and birth
Stunted. From a high dream of leisure
We brought him back to earth;

Youth spinning down to measure
His common street, his trap;
A stilled cross on the map,
Marking the world's treasure.

G. A. WAGNER

Elegy at Anzio

IN MEMORY OF A.J.A.W.

In a million wanderings we watched
The pools of moonlight, and your heart touched
The sea in trickles of misery when John died.
We watched the oars
Of sailors,
Whilst heavy with grief his mother sighed.

Tears are wet on the cheeks of sweethearts,
The myth of life is over, and as the soul parts,
The flag of ecstasy waves in the shackles
Of death. Beneath the sea
The anemone
Gyrates its elbowed tentacles

In a slow madness. Now it is sad
To hear the careful news that he is dead.
Now to-night, my darling, as I flourish
Dreams of my skill around
Your brilliant head,
Arm in arm in the evening we may wish

That poems can find no richer music
Than those frenzied tears at daybreak,
When at last they found the way,
Some conquering thrill
To quell
The furious lightning of his day.

ERNST SIGLER

Poem

Pyramus bent over the stone, observing the texture of worm,
the split lips foaming with lascivious moss,
and he knew in his rage the deceit of such darkness.

The sun pursued him, limping men grinned in his wake,
everywhere sauntered the devilish marauders:
Pyramus, eager to learn how the dead gain their peacetime,

trammelled the stone with his numb tears of rage
and their warmth tilled its sleeping ruinous eye
till in due lapse a lordling cupola sprouted
where his sling lost its aim, his anger its armour.

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

Southwards

Zenith
All these regrets
These gardens without end
Here where the toad controls its tender azure song
Where silence passes swiftly like a distracted hind
And bruised by love the nightingale sings on
Your body's rose-bush with its blossoms torn
Our hearts hang fruit-wise twin together grown
And pomegranate petals in our eyes of dawn
Descending one by one across the path are strewn

Departure

Pale their faces as they go
Bitter tears and broken sobbing

Like the cherry-petalled snow
Hands upon my kisses throbbing
Leaves of autumn glide and blow.

(Translated by Derek Stanford

G. S. FRASER

Three Poems about Love

I

Here I stand at the bar
Sipping with bitter relish
The brandy dregs of an evening
That morning will embellish

With the prestige of the lost
Chance, of the easy charms
Slipped from my slack fingers
Into my good friend's arms.

O flower fallen in water,
O love lost like a leaf,
O golden cargo, gone to wrack
Upon my shores of grief,

Drinking, as often before
Of a cup prepared too often,
I think again of these things
Which no thinking will soften:

The abstruse clues that I had,
The obvious ones that I lacked,
And the recurrent mystery:
No image is intact.

II

For the faces discompose
And the letters disconnect
And desire's murderous rage
Has an opiate effect;

So the face of Mary
Blends with Maria's face
And the possible situation
Recurs in any place.

I shall coax some other woman
Into a yielding mood:
But then, if rage and jealousy
Return in their flood.

And the woman easy to me
Be easy to other men?
Knowing the end in the start
Shall I suffer this again?

Or like slow fuses burning
Towards the shrapnel case
Shall my stored furies shatter
Love from an innocent face?

Then the terrific explosion:
All our façades cracked:
Ruin made by my folly:
And no image intact?

III

All that I got from love
Was the impulse to write
Verse for my own and others'
But seldom her delight,

Her whom my verse transforms
As the plain image in time
Loses particular presence
In the tapestry of rhyme,

That flowing tapestry
Where mingled like a stream
All possible delights
And lost fulfilments gleam:

And time transforms her, too,
And all her light would die
But for this echo, this effect,
This agonising cry.

What image is intact
From all that brilliant crowd
But those that wrung my heart
And made me cry aloud?

NICHOLAS MOORE

Ode to Sexual Beauty

I

The clever piper pipes his clever tune:
The girls stand in the garden silently,
Watching the convolutions of the moon,
The bland face amid clouds: and here I see
In these peculiar mists of mystery,
Heraldic in the dark, the naked face
Of Time, and it is time that haunts this place.

The face expands in garden colours, blooms
With the truth of beauty, and the flowerlike eyes
Gaze from the dark, until their light illumes
All the surrounding scenery, the trees,
The beds of flowers, the grass. Like exequies
For some forgotten hero, everywhere
The natural faces of the darkness stare.

Bright, and no wit, no bit invidious,
In honour of the formal beauty here.
It is imagined. Time would be to us
Less fallible, less terror were the clear
Light of the summer day to pierce the drear
Mystery of this night, and show these lawns
For what they are, white with heraldic swans.

What purity, what grace! Their fine necks curve
In arabesques; slowly their long feet plank
Upon the grass, ungainly: yet they have
Such a nobility of grace we think
Them perfect birds, as in majestic rank
They float about the lawns. What images!
How in the moon we visualise their eyes!

Leda was lucky to be swan-invaded,
Her flesh shaped to the will of a white bird,
The legendary ecstasy, paraded
In book on book until it seems absurd;
The new word leading to an older word.

Yet it has a symbolic purity:
The phallic swan, the invaded mystery.

II

It is a formal beauty only. Here
Reminding us of scene on scene we stand
Among the brilliant girls in the bright stare
Of the omniscient moon. There is a hand
Points to the future, holding in the mind
The bleak point of departure. Then it seems
We stand only amid our formal dreams,

Turning our eyes to the impenetrable
Symbols without hope. O the clever piper,
Piping the tune that we have learnt so well,
Time with his book and evening newspaper,
His pipe, his easy-chair, his velvet slipper,
The old and mutilated hero who
So eagerly confides us what to do.

The night is like a peacock's tail. The glitter
Of stars is infinite. The face we see
Now in this naked purity is better
Than ever we imagined. It is she
Who from the legend steps half-awkwardly,
Like a young girl, who hesitates and pauses,
Hearing in the dark about her our strange voices.

What innocence, what beauty! O wise clouds
To hide our thoughts and dim the revealing moon.
Our faces start, our hands are cold. Time hides
Our tempers, and our dancing to that tune.
We move like figures on a frieze, and soon
Hold only that pictorial, formal pose
That means nothing, parading images.

That ancient culpability! O sex,
Bright, starry-eyed, I see you move like swans
In secret darkness, silently, complex
Upon the broad expanses of the lawns,
With thick, ungainly feet: until the moon's
Light suddenly breaks through and luminous
Your white backs shine, whitely illustrious!

DENISE LEVERTOFF

Durgan

At Durgan waves are dark as cypresses
clear as the water of a wishing-well,
caressing the stones with smooth palms, looking
into the pools as enigmatic eyes
peer into mirrors, or music echoes
out of a wood the waking dream of day,
blind eyelids lifting to a coloured world.

Now with averted head your living ghost
walks in my mind, your shadow leans
over the half-door of dream; your footprint lies
where gulls alight; shade of a shade, you laugh.
But separate, apart, you are alive:
you have not died, therefore I am alone.

Like birds, cottages white or grey
alert on rocks are gathered, or low
under branches, dark but not desolate;
shells move over sand, or seaweed gleams
with their clear yellow, as tides recede.
Serene in storm or eloquent in sunlight
sombre Durgan where no strangers come
awaits us always, but is always lost:
we are separate, sharing no secrets, each alone;
you will listen no more, now, to the sounding sea.

IAIN FLETCHER

Tano III

Boy from cymbal and the spital,
the amber shadow on Monte Scura,
and from all tender distances of sky;
the virgin in the village in the valley
leans her episcopal vein of hair
over this peril of pure wandering.

Musk of warnings in your summer breath,
continents of time curled in your sigh,
wanderer through many mullions of the eye,
the perfume of small cousins, or the thighs
of lemon trees, now immanently still
groining the dusk that simplifies the hill.

Having wandered far enough to the
continuous blue unction of the sea;
bare lives of fishermen, eucharist
of maize and poppies as the dusk
grows down, you have wandered
too far, too far, into my heart.

BRENDA CHAMBERLAIN

From *The Green Heart*

Even as an alder
Leans to the swamp
My body rests on twilight.
The smooth gun lies along my arm;
Is a cold bough given power to harm.
Why do I stand in the marsh
To clatter woodcock from the reeds?
Am I grown to a tree, no bird to kill
In this green, timeless dusk?
Now through my wooden stillness
From the raised beak of the thrush
White hymns flood to change
The meaning of my lifted branch.
Even as an alder leans to the swamp
My body rests on embracing night.

JAMES KIRKUP

Elegy for a Dead Gardener

My gardener's bed
hovers between twin
hollyhocks, upon the leaden
miles of leaves.

His head
dials in the lake,
and on the spiral lawns
his daisy finger creeps by urns
of foliage into the netless dark.

. . . . . .

'How shall we mourn our dear dead lord,
the gardener, who made us gay,
and would not let us moulder?

He was God, and Will, and Fate.
Now it is he who must decay,
for there is none to tend him.

And we, his emblems and his fruit,
now feed upon the hands that fed us,
and twine our roots within his body's heat.

For though he lies alone and buried in the hill
our roots are long, and seek him out.
And he, too, will find us.'

. . . . . .

You will find him
underneath the summerhouses
and in their actual infinity
his shadow slopes
like strings or raffia,
his name
inscribed on every
flower-fixing peg, the saplings'
tender pendant metals.

. . . . .

Hé whose heart was in the rose
now lies conscious of its thorns.
Its name, like his,
no longer matters.
Only the dustless colours,
scent and no-scent
and the essence of a shape are his.

And he will free them
from all their imperfections
with the healing poisons of their bright
slow deaths, his own
sudden sickness.

. . . . . .

He was a tender gardener,
and with a garden's tenderness
he lived, and made it live.
The urns and balustrades
shine whiter for him in the sun.
The kitchen bricks are warm with him
who brought in logs and kindling
like offerings, with grace and silence.

The vegetable plots
already know that he is gone.
The full-throated leeks
now weep for him, and weep the eschallots.

. . . . . .

In the empty arbour
the spider weaves his threadbare
memorial banners the night
loads up with dew
and diamonds for mourning
fasten on the yew,
the box's heavy bordering.

The leafy peacock trimmed with love
grows back into its bush, invisibly,
is nature's bird,
But does not weep or sing.

. . . . . .

'We, the paths he raked and tended,
now put on the weeds of mourning and neglect.
The summer dew shall light our pebbles
with the white eye of tears,

and in the starlit mornings
dumb with winter, we shall freeze
white thoughts and moon-blanched intercessions
on the gravel of his tread.'

. . . . . .

The grotto and the fleshy ferns
drip still with surreptitious health.
The cockle shells
discover lost, mythical sands,
drum on the ears of a departed storm,
and darken into tragedy, unwashed
by the green wave
of death, or his
translucent hands.

. . . . . .

The fruit's worm-pierced bobbin
rocks in the groaning orchards.
The phantom pippin bends the poised
bough, burdened with its heart, to breaking
over his rooted eyes, his breast,
the downy fragrance of his berried nest.

The tripod cherry stalks
have mingled flesh and stone
and melt into the attitudes
he so wisely has adopted.
The graftings loose their joints,
the blossom will be rare,
and on the cherished peach
no foliage, no setting of the pear.

Gather the currants of the sun
quickly, now, before the children
come, and he
begins to be forgotten.

. . . . . .

Slow-plumed,
with a rising fall,
shaken, ephemeral,

the fountain's tall
funereal cadences are blown,
and spill from hand to hand
into the deep, concentric pools

pouring overwhelmingly to mourn
the marble thresholds
of his other land.

. . . . . .

'How shall we mourn our dear dead lord,
the gardener, who made us gay,
and would not let us moulder?

We shall wreathe him in autumn
with brown leaf from our breaking fingers,
and in the winter grieve for him
with birdless song, and the lament
of snow and rock-stillness, the wind
bringing the spring's pain,
the thaw that kills the wood.

And in the summer
he will help us to rejoice;
leaf our nakedness as he alone would desire,
with a grace of his own conceiving.

The gardener, our dear dead lord, will come again.
He will not leave us long like this,
without a word, a touch, or any thing.'

FOR THE TIME BEING

The title of this book* is a happy example of ambiguity. One may interpret it as meaning that it is a kind of stop-gap, a book which Auden has written while waiting to write something else. Or it may refer to the task,

> '*the Time Being to redeem*
> *From insignificance*',

of the Christmas Oratorio, which is the second long poem in this volume. Probably it means both by these things. If so, this title expresses aptly the strangely mixed impression which these poems produce. For, on the one hand, they show a mastery of form and detail which he has not achieved elsewhere; and, on the other hand, in their whole conception they are curiously formless.

Here, then, are two long poems, the first a commentary on Shakespeare's 'Tempest', called 'The Sea and the Mirror'; the second a Christmas Oratorio, called 'For the Time Being'. Both poems are, in one way, set pieces connected with occasions which Auden must regard with more than usual solemnity. Even as an undergraduate, he regarded 'The Tempest' as the play in which Shakespeare attempted to set out a coherent philosophy of life; but, in his view, Shakespeare lost interest in the attempt, and thus 'The Tempest' remains largely a delightful piece of play-making. But Auden must have thought about 'The Tempest' for many years, and the result is this curious and, in parts, beautiful poem. The Oratorio was written, I believe originally, so that Benjamin Britten might set it to music. While it was being written Auden's mother, to whose memory it is dedicated, died, and thus it becomes partly a Requiem.

So these poems are serious occasions, and they are almost without the buffoonery of most of Auden's books. At the same time, he has chosen forms which demand little unity. The reader does not expect either a commentary or an Oratorio to be more than a string of episodes. That is what these poems are. This must be about the twelfth book which Auden has written. And by now it is very noticeable that his mind, which is so powerful and intelligent in some ways, seems incapable of thinking of a long poem or even a play as a whole. 'The Orators' is a rag-bag; 'The Dance of Death' and 'The Dog Beneath the Skin' are episodic, the latter being knocked into actable shape by Isherwood. With all his brilliance, analytic gift and virtuosity, Auden seems quite lacking in con-

* *For the Time Being*, by W. H. Auden (Faber & Faber, 8s. 6d).

structive power which can give a book unity. Even his poems tend to be attitudes, analytic reports, strips of thought consistent in mood but without beginning or end: and often when they have a beginning and end, they seem to be held together by the subject or the formal pattern rather than by an inner unity of Auden's own experience: one of his poems about some literary personality—Housman or Pascal—is held together by the sequence of events inherent in the subject; a sestina or a ballade is held together by the exigencies of the metrical pattern.

It is not surprising, then, to find oneself liking fragments of these poems much better than others. In 'The Sea and the Mirror', the virtuosity with which complicated forms are used is very striking, and the devices for holding the poem together seem artificial. Indeed, it is scarcely possible to hold a poem together in which sonnets, *terza rima*, sestinas, ballades, a long passage of turgid prose, and alternating very loose hexameters and pentameters are intermingled. Such unity of theme as the poem has, it owes to its reference to Shakespeare. Yet there are extremely beautiful passages in this poem, other passages of admirable technique, and much that is interesting.

Perhaps the most beautiful single poem in 'The Sea and the Mirror' is the address of Alonso to Ferdinand, beginning:

> '*Dear Son, when the warm multitudes cry,*
> *Ascend your throne majestically,*
> *But keep in mind the waters where fish*
> *See sceptres descending with no wish*
> *To touch them; sit regal and erect,*
> *But imagine the sands where a crown*
> *Has the status of a broken-down*
> *Sofa or mutilated statue:*
> *Remember as bells and cannon boom*
> *The cold deep that does not envy you.*
> *The sunburnt superficial kingdom*
> *Where a king is an object.*'

The whole of this poem is excellent, and it is interesting to consider why it has a poise and balance and calm which are noticeably lacking in much of this book. The reason is that the situation of a wise and benign father addressing his son is one in which Auden is perfectly at ease. The parental relationship he has mastered, and it preoccupies him. What he understands best is a meeting of opposites which are complementary to each other and therefore

have much in common: mirror to sea, night to day, body to mind, wisdom to ignorance, etc. The idea of an ignorant child fumbling its way into consciousness is omnipresent in Auden, and it decides his attitude to his poetry.

The strength and the weakness of Auden's attitude is his absolute confidence in the conscious knowledge of some parental figure, Prospero or God, who sees through the minds of other people, and who also regards every object in the universe as a symbol, a word which can be made to mean something in the process by which ignorance is transformed into conscious knowledge. It is this great faith in consciousness which enables Auden to see everything as part of a significant psychological pattern:

'When I woke into my life, a sobbing dwarf
Whom giants served only as they pleased, I was not what I seemed;
Beyond their busy backs I made a magic
To ride away from a father's imperfect justice,
Take vengenace on the Romans for their grammar
Usurp the popular earth and blot out for ever
The gross insult of being a mere one among many . . .'

The reader can work all this out in terms of its psychological significance, because Auden has worked it all out already. Auden's theme is really not so much the strangely compounded Audenish philosophy, but really the faith that everything is significant, that wisdom can be applied to innocence, explaining its stumblings, forgiving, understanding, showing that all behaviour is a milestone on the road to completely conscious revelation.

At the same time, this attitude which gives Auden's poetry a lucid intellectual purpose has serious drawbacks. His poetry gives the impression of moving towards an ultimate explaining away of everything, instead of towards a reality which cannot be resolved into ideas. Objects in his world lack intrinsic qualities because they are not regarded as things in themselves but as things in the minds of those who experience them. Consider the following lines, which are typical of his way of thinking:

'On through winter woods, a bird's dry carcass
Agitates the retina with novel images,
A stranger's quiet collapse in a noisy street
Is the beginning of much lively speculation,
And every time some dear flesh disappears
What is real is the arriving grief. . . .'

Here, three experiences are considered, each not as itself, but as its effect on an observer. It might well be objected that 'what is real' when 'some dear flesh disappears' is not the grief only, but the intrinsic mystery that something quite outside the mind of the bereaved person happens in the world. There is an absence in Auden's work of this 'intrinsic mystery' of the fact that things happen and that, therefore, however much they may be made significant, there is also a sense in which they simply happen. Without the sense of 'intrinsic mystery' poetry tends to become a cryptic language of symbolic questions moving towards elucidation.

There are various consequences of Auden's way of thinking in his poetry. The most uneasy consequence is that he tends to seem to stand outside and above what he is writing about, in a way that often seems facile. Romantic love becomes:

> *'Will Ferdinand be as fond of a Miranda*
> *Familiar as a stocking? Will a Miranda who is*
> *No longer a silly little lovesick goose,*
> *When Ferdinand and his brave world are her profession,*
> *Go into raptures over existing at all?'*

If there is no 'intrinsic mystery' in the fact of young lovers falling in love, then these questions are inevitable, and the answer is that love is one of the cryptic signposts of a journey towards fuller intellectual consciousness, which holds no irresolvable mystery.

Immediate contact with events, which forms the subject matter of so much of the world's poetry, is also absent from Auden's work. An immediate experience is simply a symbol awaiting fuller elucidation. Personalities also are seen through, and they acquire a ghostly intellectual transparency.

Auden is an intellectual, thinking poet, who uses experiences and personalities as illustrations of a process of thought which he is developing. This thought itself is not coherently developed. If it were, it would surely by now have produced a book which had architectural unity instead of brilliant sequences of perception.

I have suggested here that there is a danger in Auden's being too intellectual, too abstract, too capable of seeing through people, nature, and events. He is like a witch doctor who has an immense realisation of the symbolism of witches—a realisation of the significance of a psychological and spiritual world far profounder than that of most people—and yet he does not actually believe in the independent existence of the forces he commands. He believes in a significance which he understands. He does not believe in the signifi-

cance of the fact that there is a solid core of reality in existence which we do not understand. Yet possibly the Preface of ' The Sea and the Mirror' shows an awareness of this weakness in the use to which he puts his poetry:

'*Well, who in his own backyard*
Has not opened his heart to the smiling
Secret he cannot quote?
Which goes to show that the Bard
Was sober when he wrote
That this world of fact we love
Is unsubstantial stuff:
All the rest is silence
On the other side of the wall;
And the silence ripeness
And the ripeness all.'

STEPHEN SPENDER

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REVIEWS

T. S. ELIOT, *What is a Classic?* (Faber & Faber, 3s. 6d.); HENRY TREECE, *The Black Seasons* (Faber & Faber, 6s.).

Whilst admiring and enjoying the poems of T. S. Eliot as being the greatest contemporary English poetry—that most expressive of the living death of the spirit of modern man—I have always found his criticism ingenious, provoking and unacceptable. Neither do I feel that my disagreement has solely been bred upon a difference of opinion regarding first principles. My contention is that Mr. Eliot has not always played fair. Like Matthew Arnold—so much depreciated by him—Mr. Eliot has had an axe to grind; a cause to serve outside the duty of pronouncing specific judgment upon individual poets. This has sometimes led him, like his predecessor, not to argue or reason his way out of a problem, but to snub or bluff his way through. We remember his early critical contests with Mr. Middleton Murray, when wanting a word at the last fence, he accused the ideas of his opponent of—damnation in the eyes of all gentlemen!—smelling of Whiggery. We remember, too, his words on Shelley (shades of Arnold!), and his block-busting epithet 'parochial' hurled at William Blake. Now 'philistine' for Matthew Arnold, 'Whiggery' for Mr. Eliot, and 'bourgeois' for the Marxist critics are powerful coins for giving the 'come-up-ing'. The area in which they are accepted as legal tender is limited, however. They are strictly partisan currency. Such means of attack the greatest critics would never use, or use and substantiate with a powerful chain of reasoning. Their language is more 'universal'; less 'parochial', in fact, in its ideological insistences. Consider, for example, the method of Coleridge.

This is merely to say that the more a critic has some historical purpose to accomplish, some fashion to create, the more will his judgment be biased. Arnold and Eliot both had such a purpose: both, I think, have served them well, with Eliot in the rôle of a kind of neo-Thomistic Arnold.

This present work of Mr. Eliot was originally given as an address to the Virgil Society in the October of last year, and its subject is the nature of a classic, determinable in the last resort by the degree to which any given author achieves what Virgil achieved in and for

the Latin language. Virgil, he describes, as 'the classic of all Europe', and insists upon the historical sense as being the most significant possession for both the poet and critic.

By this historical sense he means, I should add, the sense of the past. That history is at all concerned with a sense of the present of the future Eliot has little understood; his poetical perception of the present spectacle being as powerful as his intellectual grasp of our time is weak. (The shortcomings of his judgment with regard to contemporary political affairs are clearly seen in his articles written for 'The Criterion'.)

Because of his distrust of life Mr. Eliot has always advocated the writing of literature out of literature; or the writing of literature out of the sense of life that is past. At a time when society is more fragmentarily divided than in any age since the Reformation, Mr. Eliot urges us to discover the sense of unity with its literary reflection in a common style. Yet this common style, he seems to fancy, may partly be conjured back by the workings of the historical sense; by greater understanding and appreciation of the literature of the past. This partial manufacture of one's language removed from the organic contact of treating with life directly is a dangerous evasion of the real problem of literature, which is, fundamentally, the problem of life; of living in the 'Here and Now'.

Language is truly an historical product, and to adopt a style of language without adopting its historical background (seeing some similarity between society then and society now) is to deracinate and violate any idiom as well as to play the dilettante with time. I incline to believe that Mr. Eliot would encourage the grafting of an old style upon our own because he wishes in the same way to graft old properties on to our society. When we have learned in society to participate in a common action towards a common end, then, automatically, we shall discover the beginnings of a common style. Until that moment any prating of such will be, I believe, the conscious or unconscious voice of reaction.

Needless to say, this address of Mr. Eliot is charmingly worded in his usual urbane fashion. It abounds in neat definitions, subtle felicitous distinctions, and ingenious sophistry.

Finally, it would give me great pleasure to lend Mr. Eliot that essay of Saint-Beuve, 'What is a Classic?' which he regretted being unable to re-read.

To be at the same time Welsh and a poet is to possess an ambiguous advantage over the writers of bardless nations. Let me say—to avoid friction—that I am not out to prick the Welsh dragon or

exorcise the Glendowers come over the border. I am simply trying to state the opportunities and dangers attendant upon the talent of fluency. Every Welshman will tell you that the Welsh can sing. He is undoubtedly right; but this is not to immediately confer the status of Caruso on every individual. In the same way, a great percentage of the Welsh possess the knack of writing verse; but, relying on the lyric spirit of their race, they sometimes fail to pare the claws and groom the feathers of their lyre-bird.

The lark of Henry Treece, whose flights we witness in *The Black Seasons*, sometimes has that unkept look; or, again, it sings too easily, readily, but without a really convincing voice. The pleasure of song has become a duty or habit. Possessed of a remarkable innate ability for singing in words, the poet has too often succumbed to the seduction of occasional verse. Anything, as we say, to make a song about. Such poems are 'The Crimson Cherry Tree', with its A. E. Housman ventriloquist act:

> *'There is no sweeter sight, I swear, in Heaven*
> *Than blossom on the cherry-trees by Clee';*

and 'Christ Child', prompted by the coming-together of Christmas and a poet in search of a subject:

> *'Warm as a little mouse he lay,*
> *Hay kept him from the Winter's harm;*
> *Bleating of puzzled lambs he heard,*
> *And voices from the near-by farm.'*

There are also poem-sequences, namely, 'The Lost Ones' and 'The Second Coming', where Henry Treece appears to have seized the sensational value of his subject without waiting to assimilate the significance of his theme.

Again, in reading some of these poems I am reminded of a remark made by Lawrence Hart in an essay entitled 'Map of the Country'. Too many poets, he maintains, utilise certain verse traditions (thus avoiding the invention of a personal form) without accepting that tradition's discipline.

All these depreciations I make with a feeling of regret, having read and reviewed Mr. Treece's first book, '35 Poems', with a sense of pleasure. In addition to this, there is in *The Black Seasons* one short poem of sound merit, 'There is a cause for faith, if also one for fear'. 'The Ballad of the Prince,' which first appeared in 'The White Horseman' (1941), and which is one of the most successful long poems produced since the war, also makes a second appearance

here. In this poem the voluble style of the poet can sometimes harden surprisingly into a poignant simple statement as shown by these two quotations:

> *'I know that time is like an eagle's wing;*
> *Poised or impetuous it is the same*
> *Inevitably thrust, harsh as a nail,*
> *Grey as the old King's beard. . . .*

> *'I wake and know the day is not for me.*
> *Under the tongue is tied a grain of sand*
> *That snaps my appetite as I snap bread*
> *Alone in the home.'*

DEREK STANFORD

NICHOLAS MOORE, *The Glass Tower* (Nicholson & Watson, 8s. 6d.); STANLEY SNAITH, *Stormy Harvest;* CLIFFORD DYMENT, *The Axe in the Wood;* HAL SUMMERS, *Smoke After Flame* (Dent, 3s. 6d. each); DOROTHY PARKER, *Collected Poetry* (Random House, U.S.A.); PATRICK TUDOR-OWEN, *Patterns and Poems* (Fortune, 6s.); R. N. HIGINBOTHAM, *A London Satire* (The Author, 1s. 6d.); RUSSELL IRWIN, *Picnic to the Moon* (Fortune, 8s. 6d.).

A teacher taking a drawing-class of ten-year-olds will use a different method of instruction, different examples, different models, different language to the teacher at an art school; the pupils of either might find it difficult to follow a conversation about drawing between, say, Henry Moore and Graham Sutherland. There will be little argument about that.

Then why the constant complaints from people at the mental age of eight or ten, that 'Modern Poetry' is difficult and obscure? If they cannot understand a poem (as if comprehension were all that is needed for its appreciation) does not the fault lie with them, for expecting the poet to aim his work only at emotional and intellectual apprentices? If 'You look like History'—which surely does not call for great mental strain from anybody—leaves you icy, whereas you wept acrid tears over 'The White Cliffs of Dover'—is Nicholas Moore to be blamed for that, or you, for being so steeped in commercialised sentimentality that you have become incapable of private emotions?

Am I being obvious? One needs to be. The editor of this magazine, for instance, was recently 'taken to task' for stating that the writing of poetry is a craftsman's job, and that only those people who read a lot of poetry will read it without difficulty—which is as obviously true as it would be to say that you will hardly be stirred by Britten's music if your soul touches the heights when a Sinatra swoons over the Dolly with the Hole in her Stocking, and would your admiration for De Lazlo's noses allow you to enthuse over Mr. Piper's skies?

Perhaps it is the poet's task to convey in words his own private world, to state again and again the fundamentals of his life: but he can hardly be expected to illuminate thereby your world and life if you are hiding them behind the glare of neon and searchlights and technicolour; he becomes, as far as you are concerned, *the ghost of a shadow under a dream*, as Nicholas Moore puts it. And will you see him there?

> '*With the coming of the morning*
> *More will come than our personal song,*
> *But it will be a part of the people's,*
> *The revolution in the world*
> *That makes a star more than a star.*'

That makes a star more than a star: behind this line of Moore's which expresses what is in the end the hope of every poet, can you feel the sense of futility, of unbelief that such a dream can ever be fulfilled? For you poetry has come to be like the Glass Tower which grows in the forest in the hope perhaps to catch the glint of the sun:

> '*Only a pretty piece*
> *Of vanity, ridiculously lovely,*'

and

> '*we only see the trees*
> *That hide it with their bulk. . . .*'

Whenever the *futile accident* occurs and the glass tower is beheld, it will be the poet who seeks and sees and, like the child,

> '*is always asking questions.*
> *Do you love this world, he says, this*
> *Daily habit of breakfast, eggs and*
> *Toast, the morning paper, scandal, crises,*
> *And the interminable dullness of your love?*'

The poems which Nicholas Moore has selected from his enviably

large output for this finely produced volume, ought to present no great difficulties to the reader, or critic, who wishes simply to understand. There are clues enough to help him: invocations, *My darling, my darling* (that must be about Love); deliberate unsubtleties: *Unter den Linden rides the car of triumph* (that must be about Politics, or something); there are sufficient phrases designed to give a pleasant shock of horror; but these incidentals will not make his *disasters clear;* nor why he should be *the poet, mad/With my own misery, and man's;* nor why, in his love, *knowing the shapes of stones* he should seek to find the *colour That the shells reflect.*

Here is a maturing poet's choice of those early poems of his which he wishes to preserve:

'*Read, read between the lines, and he will not fail you.*'

. . . . . .

Stormy Harvest, by Stanley Snaith, is a book I have enjoyed reading for its minute nature pieces which, so long as their author does not follow the urge to moralise, are quietly pleasing in their unpretentious way. In his most successful poems, such as '1942', he does indeed, as the blurb claims, remind of Edward Thomas and, perhaps, Alun Lewis:

'*History, for these, marched only in the pulse;*'

but to speak of finches as *harvest guests* and of their *sweet thieving* and *delicate visit* is a little too Strongish.

Covering somewhat similar ground, Mr. Dyment's 'established' poeticising seems, by comparison, a continual groping for the unimaginative word: *How vivid nature is—ash, holly and peculiar bough—the lurid hill—the immeasurable galaxy* (of stars)—*the shy joy of girls* (at a dance); or so pedestrian as to make one feel very clever and way ahead of him (in 'Holidays in Childhood', for example); or just bathetic:

'*The roses were all over*
When he went across the sea
With a kitbag and a gun.
O wild rose tree.'

A poet who is as well equipped technically as Mr. Dyment ought to know that he cannot any longer make us horror-struck with simply the words: kitbag, rifle, sentry, bayonet, bomber, etc. This is a careless, listless collection with only one or two redeeming pieces.

Mr. Summers' verse will remind you of MacNeice, Kenneth Allott ('An Old Photograph') and Auden—or is it the Erlking?:

'O what are those balloons like whales
Swimming in the sky for joy, father?'

or rather parodies of them and others. He declares his indebtedness to Mr. Farjeon, and many of his poems are written in the style of high-class revue lyrics with tragic undertones. But within the restrictions of its author's talent—as the blurb so delightfully puts it: 'his verse is always about something tangible, something that *happens*'—this book is well worth the price to—shall we say—art school students.

A collection of Dorothy Parker's rhymes—how did she get in here?—will delight your 'sophisticated' girl friend who does so like a nice read of a poem. In case you are not acquainted with Mrs. Parker, she is a lady who coins bonmots and strums a one-string guitar, in the best New Yorker style, about hapless maidens and fickle lovers:

'Helen of Troy had a wandering glance;
Sappho's restriction was only the sky;
Ninon was ever the chatter of France,
But oh, what a good girl am I,'

To descend from there, this extract, for your collection, from a poem called 'Journey', by Patrick Tudor-Owen·

'Dire
Heavings now are ours
On pestilential
Cushions, springless as
The metals—third class,
How providential
There is no fourth.'

A London Satire has all the literary impact and old-world charm of inscriptions on a lavatory wall. *My voice goes up and down with monotonous emphasis*, says Mr. Higinbotham—agreed: the emphasis is on perversions he has found in London and with which he is delighted to be disgusted.

I feel I ought to prove that I have really read *Picnic to the Moon* by quoting from it, but the difficulty is that to give an indication of the texture of this book one ought to quote all of it or nothing, so well are the poems balanced. They are all terrible.

ERNST SIGLER

ALEC CRAIG, *The Aspirin Eaters* (The Fortune Press, 4s. 6d.); IAIN SERRAILLIER, *The Weaver Birds* (Macmillan, 5s.); *Poems from Ireland* (*The Irish Times*, 7s. 6d.); GEORGE BARKER, *Eros in Dogma* (Faber, 6s.); LOUIS MACNEICE, *Springboard* (Faber, 6s.).

As a motto for his book Mr. Craig quotes Mr. Eliot: 'Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*'. This is a theme which he elaborates in his preface, and which runs clearly through his poems; he trusts 'that the complete collection', written during the decade up to the beginning of this war, 'constitutes a commentary on the period of sufficient interest to deserve more permanent form'. The permanent form is provided by the Fortune Press's excellent paper, the commentary by the poems—and they do to a certain extent justify Mr. Craig's hope that they will interest. He has wit—at its best in 'Mr. Eliot's Saturday Morning in a Government Office', which has a social-satiric motif besides being a witty parody:

> '*In eighteen sixty-six the Act*
> *Proceeded from the Grand Old Man,*
> *When "Pensions (Princess Volupine)"*
> *Shook the first economy fan.*'

But his art is very limited; he has an acute eye for society, and great cleverness in apeing and at the same time satirising the modes of his time, but he contributes little positive of his own, and his poems are all on one theme, '*Was* it really worth it, All the milk we spilt?' But it *is* a commentary on that generation.

Mr. Serraillier is a most original poet, and by and large he is most successful in his innovations. Of course, it *is* possible to see antecedents for his work, but it still remains a fact that he is writing poems markedly different from those of most of his contemporaries, and with considerable success. There is great virtue in that. First, there are the narrative poems, and they really are narratives in the narrow sense; they tell stories, legends, sometimes quizzically, sometimes seriously, sometimes humorously. They vary among themselves and within themselves, and they are delightful. They are some of them light, but always sufficiently serious to stir the mind. He revivifies old legends and makes them relevant to the present, sometimes with 'shockingly vulgar' colloquialisms, but for the most part they come off. Second, there are the sonnets, which seem to owe something in technique to Hopkins, but which are much gentler in mood. They are nature poems, clear, visual, real.

One is a paraphrase from Martial, another is entitled 'Wild Mountains and a Valley Strewn with Rocks'. Best of all is 'The Barge', which turns from a poem of observation to a poem of moral comment by a neat clinching metaphor. In these chosen manners Mr. Serraillier works well, with a classical sense of discipline. The varied poems at the end perhaps show some signs that he wishes to expand his field. But he has already achieved something. It speaks much for him that he has not succumbed to the temptation to reprint in his book the dreadful piece of doggerel by which he was represented in 'Lyra'!

Poems from Ireland is excellent. It succeeds in spite of the fact that all the poems first appeared in *The Irish Times*, in presenting a really solid body of modern Irish verse. Mr. Donagh MacDonagh has clearly edited most scrupulously and carefully: the level of accomplishment is high. It includes poems by W. B. Yeats, Joseph Campbell, Lord Dunsany, Austin Clarke, F. R. Higgins, Frank O'Connor, Ewart Milne, Cecil Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice, W. R. Rodgers, L. A. G. Strong, Peter Wells, and many others less well known. It concludes fittingly with Yeats' 'Under Ben Bulben', and, though there is nothing else quite so good as this, there is much that is good. Austin Clarke and F. R. Higgins are both notable for the glitter and brilliance of their verse, full of muted rhymes and assonance, and, though the depth of meaning is perhaps not equal to the surface skill of the writing, both are represented by excellent poems. (Higgins' 'The Boyne Walk', I would specially mention). Among those of the middle generation (MacNeice's), Patrick Kavanagh and Padraic Fallon stand out. The former is an uneven writer, but he is well-represented here. His poetry has a curious earthy tang about it, which is attractive when it does not become too obtrusive. Padraic Fallon's 'Song from a Play' is beautifully written, musical and subtle, and his translation from Raftery, 'Mary Hynes,' seems to me to show equally a remarkable talent. Among the younger poets Donagh MacDonagh himself, Maurice James Craig, and G. M. Brady show the most considerable achievement, especially MacDonagh; though there are also poems of interest by Roy MacFadden and Valentin Iremonger. And among the rest Geoffrey Taylor and Joseph Campbell have good poems. There is little that is really outrageously bad, a remarkable thing in anthologies nowadays! And, apart from the merits of the individual poems, it seems to give an excellently sound idea of the general tendency and achievement of modern Irish verse, and an encouraging one at that. For the general effect is realistic, in a good

sense, tough, controlled and skilful writing, which shows up very well beside the Celtic Twilight which precedes it. I don't think Ireland, on this showing, need despair of its poetry. I wonder if any English newspaper will ever run a weekly column of poetry in which so much serious and promising poetry is printed? (All papers please copy!)

Eros in Dogma, George Barker's new book, is exhilarating—full of charm, simplicity, depth, and cunning. Mr. Barker becomes a more and more considerable poet, and his 'Pacific Sonnets' and love poems (especially some in the second cycle), together with 'Bamborough Castle' and 'Calamiterror' among his earlier poems, seem to me the best things he has written. In the other sonnets and the 'Secular and Sacred Elegies' there is also much that is excellent and delightful. All his faults, and mannerisms, and gaucheness (greater in these sequences than those I have singled out) pale before the genuine singleness of his poetic impulse. He is already one of the most real and most successful poets of our time.

'Mr. MacNeice is one of the few poets who can make, out of immediate events, poetry which is neither trivial or transitory . . .' remark his publishers; and therein, it seems to me, point to Mr. MacNeice's weakness as a poet. Technically, he is extremely adept and he has a brilliant superficial command of language, yet, in spite of his attempts to write *serious* poetry, the fact is that it usually *does* remain trivial and transitory. Very clever, yes, but very shallow also. Thus he is best and at his most delightful when he feels no obligation to be serious, in such poems as 'Nuts in May', 'Swing-Song,' or 'Babel', whereas his more ambitious poems ('The Casualty', or 'The Kingdom') are failures. He is an intellectual poet, but a sentimentalist at heart. Because of this his work lacks both a simple descriptive power (his descriptions are always intellectualised, 'clever') and also any serious depth (he cannot refrain from 'mocking' even himself. This dualism, in his case, weakens his poetry, because it so obviously disturbs him and prevents him being the serious poet he would, with his 'large ideals', most wish to be. He is like the satirist of his own poem:

> *'Who is that man so deftly filling his pipe*
> *As if creating something? That's the reason:*
> *He is not creative at all, his mind is dry*
> *And bears no blossom even in the season,*
> *He is an onlooker, a heartless type,*
> *Whose hobby is giving everyone else the lie.'*

It is, of course, a pathetic and terrible quandary to be in for one whose superficial talents are so great, and of this Mr. MacNeice himself seems to be increasingly aware. He is, in fact, on the 'springboard'. Where will he dive? How will he negotiate the waters, now that he sees he will have sometime to take the plunge?

These books, in sum, seem to show a healthy talent in the poetry of our present time: there is no need to despair of or denigrate it. No upsurge of cliché-ridden banalities in verse, such as that with which we are at present afflicted, will drown it or, one hopes, alter it very much. There *is* hope.

NICHOLAS MOORE

The Crown and the Sickle, edited by J. F. HENDRY and HENRY TREECE (Staples, 6s.).

Condensed thesis; the purpose of criticism is to assess achievement and direction. A dual evaluation demanding a nice mixture of faith, scepticism, breadth and bias, an ultra-sensitive ear, an historical armour against hysteria, brass and bellows, mediocre iconoclasm. A duality then, in which comparative and correlative judgment is fused with an uncritical and unmapped awareness.

Thus equipped with at least the scaffolding of an honest approach, and with a wary eye on prefabricated standards of judgment, let us consider the fifty poems, three stories, one essay, two pieces of poetic prose, several pages of sentences in their own right, and single masque (or prose-poetic fable) constituting the third volume of the Apocalyptic trilogy.

J. F. Hendry's confused, powerful introductory essay, in some ways the most interesting—certainly the most intelligent piece of writing in this anthology, is an uneasy synthesis of the contradictions inherent in an original and massive idealism striving to particularise and dissect. As one who had always sensed a Scottish, at least a Neo-Celtic lyric primitivism as being a primary subjective base in our modern Apocalyptics, I find the impact of this prose (in the book as a whole) disappointingly non-gingery, the ideas important, even incendiary, but no more up-and-doing than a fervent Calvinist reformer or a Welsh Revivalist. Add a violent explosive imagery like the hailstorm of a smashed machine, or add the Blake-Hopkins-Hendry constructed personal-social fury (wordy worldscape), and you certainly arrive at that weird thrill (from glands to godhead) which most of the Apocalyptic poets do succeed in evoking. Most,

but not all; for remove the native myth-founts and the throbbing structures crumble into galvanic pastiche. Thus, Peter Wells cavorts like an excited but inexperienced doe in the direction of the full-blooded Apocalyptic horses. Lines like: 'Have you not heard of the sudden pause in our relation? . . . Fear rising ascendant and shrieking over my spine. . . . You are, yes, brittle-virgin, tumbling where hunger howls from the dictator's heels. . . . And you, O you, with roses sprouting from a fist of thorns', limp after Treece, Thomas and Hendry too lamely, all manner and no substance. The 'hunger, howl and heel' device has had its day; 'fist of thorns' sounds too familiar, and the collapse into 'Have you not heard . . .' etc., show the bathetic gaps in a style which is too cerebrally derived. Not so with Dorian Cooke, who despite inevitable affinities would wring and hew a single-minded monument out of this shared and tortured language. The important part of Leslie Phillips poetry is not of this trend and, I don't know whether surprisingly, succeeds in maintaining a quite unusual, satisfyingly poetic balance between Hopkins, the last thirty years, and Leslie Phillips.

'The crown', says Henry Treece, 'is glory, victory, the imagination; the sickle is the surgical reason.' Admirable; and the attempt to forge a creative, a biological concomitant to the pressure towards political change, intelligent and courageous.

But real 'schools', like real historical movements, grow defined and appraisable only after certain determined periods. Contemporary witnesses are guessing. My guess is that the emotive cohesion and eventual motive behind the label 'Apocalyptic Writing' is too amorphous and immediately pointless for collective assessment. The label remains merely a cryptic slogan, its very employment the 'object' Hendry warns us against. At the same time, one senses in Schimanski's 'Knight and the Devil' and Treece's 'To the Edge and Back' certain recognisable directions and compulsions, beyond the thematic similarities to sources which could perhaps identify a modern group. But only at source. For the final effects of these pieces are quite dissimilar. Schimanski, distrusting symbolism as an end, strives to present a more than Promethean theme, an ambitious Argument simply and directly. Technically unadorned, the flashes of insight and of philosophic beauty are startling; the yawning banalities, where continuity lags and the Muse is whipped, rather bad. But 'Knight and Devil' is exciting and suggestive. 'To the Edge and Back' writhes and, resting, sings between the furies of unbridled word-madness and the shallows and calms of a jingling lyricism.

There is nothing exceptional about most of the other poetry

included, nor should we be too ready to overlook the now familiar merits and ineffectualities of poets like Wrey Gardiner, Alex Comfort, Robert Greacen and Robert Herring. Comfort's catholicity of perception and image, strangely Whitmanesque in range, almost the exact opposite in æsthetic compulsion, continues to evoke that trembling atmospheric accumulative hinting at a cruel, an inexorably serene timelessness. Seán Jennett, who can digest his Eliot, is too uneven, spoiling two gravely tender poems, pastoral and eloquent, with an attempt at philosophic homily, by such phrases as 'the scrawl of war', and rhetorical jeremiads, 'Oh, who will shoot the ranting man, O who destroy the evil glory . . .?' Wrey Gardiner scores by aiming at simple bullseyes with precision. Only they are not so simple, and through this contented sadness runs more than the surface bitter-sweet of resignation. Especially in 'Goodbye—Goodbye', with its refreshing and unpretentious lucidity, although the poem as a whole is almost ruined by an unexpectedly clumsy last line. 'Seascape' is a perfect miniature.

Terence White's hack profundities are not much worse than several lengthier experiments in the book, in which an unattractive flavour of strain and melodrama suggests an anti-climatic hollow purple. Dreams, visions and nightmares, reported however honestly, or even charmingly, nearly always lack—not immediate intelligibility, that isn't the point—but the profounder discipline of concern with shape and values.

The Crown and the Sickle is not easy reading, nor has it any significant uniformity even of the broadest in the technical sphere of mastery of medium and finished presentation, the ideological sphere of eventual statement. The common basis at best, I feel, remains a negative reaction to tyranny and repression. A second reading confirms one's first impression that the best pieces of writing in the book are Hendry's essay and the short stories by Alex Comfort and Fred Marnau. These two stories especially are professional in the best sense. Comfort, whether right or wrong in total implication, in politico-æsthetic direction, is certainly right and ripe in allowing the ideas and judgments to come into being because and out of a passionate creative objectivity, a living canvas. Marnau, in 'The Wrinkled Women', emerges as perhaps the only pure writer in the book. In his detached, mildly ironic, deliberately artless prose, is a way of looking at things which is both pure and mature. For all its slightness one feels that this story is more than an elaborate trifle. Other critics will, I am sure, comment on Marnau's high place in this anthology.

JOHN SINGER

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